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The CIA's Journalists

New Charges Raise Old Questions About the Media and Intelligence

By Richard Harwood
and Walter Pincus

FOR MANY YEARS there was an immutable rule in the Central Intelligence Agency: Its sources of information and its methods of collection would never be revealed. This rule was broken in November, 1973, by "an authoritative source" who was in fact William Colby, the CIA director at that time. This "source" revealed to The Washington Star that the CIA had "some three dozen American journalists working abroad on its payroll as undercover informants."

The following year two former government employees, Victor Marchetti from the CIA and John D. Marks from the State Department, published a book — "The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence" — in which they explored further the relationships between the agency and American journalists. They described how the agency looked for "possible recruits in the press corps" and told of its efforts to "place a CIA operator under 'deep cover' with a reputable media outlet."

This subject was pursued in 1975 and 1976 by committees of the House and Senate as part of

Harwood is deputy managing editor of The Post. Pincus is a member of The Post's national news staff.



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their inquiries into the CIA and its activities. The Senate committee, headed by Frank Church (D-Idaho), published its report in April, 1976, and concluded that "some other covert relationships" "were employed by the CIA as late as February, 1976."

On Oct. 4, Rolling Stone magazine published another account of how the CIA has subverted American newspapers, magazines and wire services through "relationships" with their employees. The article is written by Carl Bernstein of The Washington Post. It says "the CIA's use of the American press has been much more extensive than the officials have acknowledged public sessions with members of Congress. The estimate is that over the past 25 years, 400 American journalists" are involved.

These allegations over the years have been mildly, raised serious questions about the integrity and the credibility of the press. Is the CIA shaping the news for the American people? Are American journalists roaming the world as undercover agents for the agency? Are the news organizations silent partners in the CIA's operations?

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The truth is hard to come by because of the adamant refusal of the CIA to make a full disclosure of its relationships with journalists and their employers. Nor has there been voluntary disclosure by the individuals and institutions that may have been involved.

Nevertheless, the fact that *some* journalists and *some* of their employers have on *some* occasions provided *some* services to the CIA seems beyond dispute.

Colby's Three Categories

THE FIRST solid evidence came from Colby himself in his interview with The Star four years ago. He said at that time, according to The Star, that "five full-time staff correspondents with general-circulation news organizations . . . function as undercover contacts for the CIA and are paid for their services on a regular contractual basis." Three of the five, according to that report, worked for the CIA without the knowledge of their employers; the other two were employed with the full knowledge of their employers.

None of the five, Colby reported, "were regular staff correspondents of major American daily newspapers with regular overseas bureaus."

The implication is that they were employed either by one or more of the broadcasting networks or by one or more of the major wire news services or by magazines. The further implication is that they were not employed by The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, The Chicago Daily News, The Christian Science Monitor or the handful of other daily newspapers that maintain "regular overseas bureaus."

In addition to the five correspondents with "general-circulation news organizations," Colby revealed to The Star that 25 other part-time "journalists" were in the employ of the CIA.

They were described then as "free-lance magazine writers, 'stringers' [occasional contributors] for newspapers, news magazines and news services and itinerant authors . . . Agents in this category are not regularly identified with any single publication and most of them are full-time informants who frankly use their writing or reporting as cover for their presence in a foreign city. Most of them are American citizens. Most are paid directly and regularly for services rendered [to the CIA]."

A third category of "journalistic" agents at that time, Colby disclosed, consisted of "eight writers for small, limited circulation specialty publications such as certain types of trade journals or commercial newsletters . . . most in this group operate as paid CIA informants with the approval of their employers."

When Marchetti and Marks dealt with this subject in their book in 1974, they added nothing to the numbers revealed by Colby the previous year. But they provided anecdotes about some of the efforts the CIA had made to "penetrate" news organizations. One incident involved William Attwood, who was then foreign editor of Look magazine. Attwood said the CIA approached him in the 1950s and offered to provide him with a correspondent in New Delhi and to pay the man's salary. Attwood said he declined.

The Church committee did a more thorough job in its

investigations in 1975 and 1976. It had access to certain CIA materials and concluded that in February, 1976, 50 American journalists were working for the agency. It found that two employed by "general-circulation U.S. news organizations" were also employed by the CIA; that "less than 10" writers for "small or limited circulation U.S. publications, such as trade journals or newsletters," were using those jobs as "cover" for their CIA employment; that approximately 35 to 40 other "free-lancers," "stringers" and itinerant writers had CIA ties and "most" of them were on the CIA payroll. A "few" of the news organizations which bought material from "free-lancers" and "stringers" were "aware of their CIA relationships."

The committee also reported that at some time in the past "more than a dozen United States news organizations and commercial publishing houses . . . provided cover for CIA agents abroad. A few of these organizations were unaware that they provided this cover."

So up until last year, the evidence, such as it was, indicated the following:

- That in the first half of the 1970s as many as 50 "journalists" — most of them "free-lance" writers employed by no particular news organization — performed paid services for the CIA.

- That in some cases — perhaps 10 or 12 — news organizations were aware that they had as their own employees CIA agents posing as journalists.

- That, so far as is known, no "regular staff correspondents of major American daily newspapers with regular overseas bureaus" served as agents for the CIA.

"More Than 400"

NEXT MONTH, with the publication of the Rolling Stone article by Carl Bernstein, the indictment will be expanded:

" . . . More than 400 American journalists . . . in the past 25 years have secretly carried out assignments for the Central Intelligence Agency, according to documents on file at CIA headquarters. Some of these journalists' relationships with the agency were tacit; some were explicit. There was cooperation, accommodation and overlap. Journalists provided a full range of clandestine services — from simple intelligence collection to serving as go-betweens with spies in Communist countries. Reporters shared their notebooks with the CIA. Editors shared their staffs. Some of the journalists were Pulitzer Prize winners, distinguished reporters who considered themselves ambassadors-without-potfolio for their country."



CIA's operations center in Langley.

Photo by Stanley Tretick for Time magazine

Bernstein writes that the Church committee in 1975 and 1976 had received 400 summaries of past CIA operations "where journalists had been used." From these summaries, he says, it appeared "200 to 250 were 'working journalists' in the usual sense of the term — reporters, editors, correspondents, photographers; the rest were employed (at least nominally) by book publishers, trade publications and newsletters." (One distinction Bernstein fails to note, a Church committee aide has pointed out, is that at least half the summaries from CIA involved foreign, not American, journalists.)

Bernstein estimates that between 75 to 90 journalists "of every description — executives, reporters, stringers, photographers, columnists, bureau clerks and members of broadcast technical crews" still had "ties" to the CIA in 1976.

And, he charges, "although the agency has cut back sharply on the use of reporters since 1973 . . . some journalist-operatives are still posted abroad."

This also was the conclusion reached by the Church committee in 1976. It reported that CIA Director George Bush in February, 1976, had ordered the agency to end all paid or contractual relationships with "any full-time or part-time news correspondent accredited" to an American news organization. But this order did not apply to unaccredited free-lance writers or stringers working abroad or to Americans employed by foreign publications. (An "accredited" correspondent or stringer is a person issued credentials by a news organization.)

By the Church committee's estimate, the Bush order left about 25 American CIA operatives working abroad in some kind of journalistic capacity. The number of foreign nationals employed by the CIA and working as journalists abroad was estimated by the Church committee to be "several hundred."

Naming Names

THE COMMITTEE'S report identified no individual journalists or news organizations having ties to the CIA. The agency adamantly refused to disclose the names. Bernstein, however, names about a dozen past or present journalists who, he writes, at some time had some type of relationship with the CIA. He cites unnamed CIA sources and previously published accounts.

One of the ambiguities surrounding these "relationships" is illustrated by the case of Joseph Alsop, the retired columnist.

Bernstein writes that Alsop went to the Philippines in 1953 because the "CIA thought his presence there might affect the outcome of an election." Alsop's response to Bernstein was: "Des Fitzgerald [then head of CIA's clandestine operations] urged me to go. It would be less likely that the left could steal the election if the eyes of the world were on them. I stayed with the ambassador and wrote about what happened."

Alsop said he paid his own way and "never received a dollar. I never signed a secrecy agreement. I didn't have to . . . I've done things for them when I thought they were the right thing to do . . . The CIA did not open itself at all to people it did not trust. Stew [Alsop's late brother] and I were trusted, and I'm proud of it."

That was one kind of relationship.

Another involved news organizations providing "cover" for CIA operatives. Colby in 1973 and the

Church committee in 1976 described some of those arrangements but again gave no names. But Bernstein writes:

"A high-level CIA official with a prodigious memory says The New York Times provided cover for about 10 CIA operatives between 1950 and 1966; he does not know who the agents were or who in the newspaper's management made the arrangements."

He goes on to say the cover arrangement with The Times was made "under arrangements approved by the newspaper's late publisher, Arthur Hays Sulzberger."

The CIA agents, according to Bernstein, "posed as stringers for the paper abroad and worked as members of clerical staffs in The Times' foreign bureaus."

When the story about The Times providing "cover" for the CIA was first published in January, 1976, the newspaper's present publisher, Arthur Ochs Sulzberger, said, "I never heard of the Times being approached either in my capacity as publisher or as the son of the late Mr. Sulzberger." This statement was reissued in response to the Bernstein article.

Bernstein writes that many other news organizations and their executives were named by unidentified sources as having "lent their cooperation to the agency."

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The CIA's Journalists



Sen. Frank Church (D-Idaho), left, with former CIA Director William Colby.

Associated Press

His list includes William Paley of CBS, the late Henry Luce of Time, Inc., the late Philip Graham of The Washington Post, Barry Bingham Sr. of The Louisville Courier Journal, the late James Copley of the Copley News Service, NBC, ABC, the Associated Press, United Press International, Reuters, Newsweek and various other organizations.

A Cloud of Doubt

THESE ALLEGATIONS have provoked a raft of denials by individuals and organizations on the list. But these and earlier allegations leave a cloud over American news institutions. It is a cloud that is not easily dissipated. The people and institutions that have worked for the CIA have not come forward with their version of the facts. The CIA has refused until now to provide the names of those who were involved.

Requests under the Freedom of Information Act for this information have been filed by such newspapers as The Times and The Washington Post and, according to the newspapers, the requests have been refused.

Even legislative bodies, such as the Church committee, have been unable to set the record straight. Bernstein charges that in the case of the Church committee, there was a deliberate coverup of information. "... Top officials of the CIA," he wrote "... persuaded the committee to restrict its inquiry ... and to deliberately misrepresent the actual scope of the activities in its final report."

This charge is vehemently denied by Church:

"The report we issued was accurate, as far as we knew. We never said we got everything ... I'm sick and tired of every three months having someone say there's another coverup."

Bernstein's charges against the committee, he said,

Bernstein's charges against the committee, he said, are "baseless" and his article is a "rehash of an old story."

Bernstein also writes that William Bader, the Church committee's staff investigator for the CIA-press inquiry, had reviewed detailed files on 25 journalists who had CIA relationships. Those 25 files, said Bernstein, led to "an unavoidable conclusion ... that to a degree never widely suspected, the CIA in the 1950s and '60s and even early 1970s had concentrated its relationships with journalists in the most prominent sectors of the American press corps, including four or five of the largest newspapers in the country, the broadcast networks and the two major news-weekly magazines."

Although the names of journalists and their organizations were deleted from these 25 detailed files, Bernstein wrote, "the newsman, his affiliation or both" could be identified, "particularly because so many of them were prominent."

Bader, who is now with the Defense Intelligence Agency, insists that "there was absolutely no way to know who all the people were" in the 25 files, although he could "guess at a few." Many of the 25, he said, were foreign journalists not employed by American news organizations.

Bader also disagreed with Bernstein's assertion that the files showed CIA concentration on major U.S. news organizations. "There was no way," said Bader, "for anyone to have known that, even it were true."

So there is considerable uncertainty as to the accuracy of some of Bernstein's claims and sweeping conclusions.

And that is an appropriate verdict on the whole issue of journalists and the CIA. Little is known as fact; much is suspected.

In these circumstances, even the normal and necessary dealings between journalists and the CIA are subject to dark imaginings. It is a condition that will continue so long as the truth is buried in the CIA vaults at Langley.

George F. Will

Carl Bernstein On CIA and the Press

It is said by and about journalists that they always should have an "adversary relationship" with their government. But that does not describe most journalists' daily experiences, or any journalist's real range of duties.

The question of journalists' responsibilities is raised in the October issue of "Rolling Stone," a magazine principally concerned with pop music. Carl Bernstein, of Watergate fame, writes that approximately 400 journalists have cooperated with the CIA over the years. Bernstein does not reach thumping judgments, if only because he seems to assume that only one judgment—disapproval—is possible regarding cooperation with the CIA.

But Bernstein's language blurs important distinctions. For example, in 1963, columnist Joseph Alsop went to the Philippines at the suggestion of a friend in the CIA. Alsop and his friend hoped that his reporting might prevent the left from stealing the election.

Bernstein cites this as an example of how journalists "have secretly carried out assignments for" the CIA. Actually only God, and He only deferentially, could give Alsop an "assignment."

The 400 journalists Bernstein writes about include some who allegedly have been asked by the CIA to do something unrelated to journalism (for example, recruit a foreign national); and some who have been asked by the CIA to go somewhere and share their findings with the CIA; and others who traveled somewhere without CIA prompting but shared their findings.

Some news organizations allegedly have given film to the CIA, have provided credentials for CIA "cover" abroad, have allowed journalists to act as intermediaries for the CIA in dealing with foreign nationals and have received CIA subsidies.

Because of skittishness all around, the illusion that the Cold War is over, and the current notion that the CIA is pitch that should not be touched, cooperation between journalists and the CIA has decreased. But much of what used to occur was good craftsmanship, and good citizenship, by newsmen.

Some journalists abroad have routinely visited CIA agents in countries they covered. It is a journalist's job to develop information sources. That also is the CIA's job, so agents have asked journalists to brief them about what they learn.

In this way the U.S. government has learned information journalists were going to publish and other observations

that, for whatever reason, they were not going to publish. What the journalists did was not only professionally permissible (bartering information is part of the journalist's art, and sharing information is the essence of his trade) but civically praiseworthy. And foreign governments have no grounds for objecting when journalists report to anyone observations they have been free to make.

Other forms of cooperation with the CIA are more problematic because they may compromise, or seem to compromise, the independence of the news system, and may jeopardize the freedom of all U.S. journalists to operate in particular countries. No reporter should be a paid agent, because (among other reasons) his life may depend on being able to deny such a relationship convincingly.

But few other forms of cooperation are inherently, meaning "in all situations," impermissible. Life is not so safe and simple, and journalists are not so special, that they have no obligations except to the professional code they write for themselves.

Journalists have been haunted by the fact that some news organizations knew of preparations for the Bay of Pigs invasion and might have prevented a fiasco had they ignored government pleas for secrecy. This, and the fact that journalists, even more than most Americans, believe they have been lied to more than necessary, have caused some journalists to conclude that the controlling principle of their profession is to regard the government as simply an "adversary."

The "adversary" idea has about it the antiauthority aroma of the day. It also spares the media the pain of exercising judgment about difficult matters, such as when to publish information that could damage the national interest (for example, diplomatic secrets), and when to cooperate with important government purposes (for example, intelligence gathering).

The "adversary" idea allows journalists to believe that they are not obligated to consider how any particular action affects the national interest. According to this convenient doctrine, the national interest is the government's problem, and the government is an "adversary."

No simple catchphrase explains the proper relationship of news people to their government. But the problem with the "adversary relationship" can be stated simply: Journalists are, if not citizens first, at least citizens also.